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ABSTRACT

A collection in English of selected readings is presented from "Phau Xyuaum Nyeem Zaj Lus," a publication used as a Hmong literacy primer. The purpose of the collection is threefold: (1) to provide intermediate limited English proficient Hmong refugees with reading passages in English that they could relate to; (2) to present Hmong world views in a nontechnical manner as a means of promoting cross-cultural understanding in culturally diverse classrooms; and (3) to preserve cultural traditions for younger Hmong who have few solid memories of their origins. The contents include passages on the following: soil, water, rocks and stones, trees, spreading and standing crops, choosing seeds, planting vegetable gardens, seed development, corn, the animal world, animals beneficial to man, animals harmful to man, turtles, bats, "green medicine" (herbs), individually owned tools, and communal tools. (LB)

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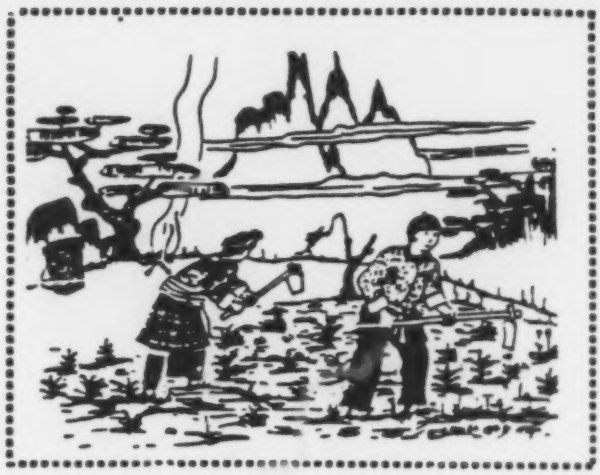

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Preface

Hmong Way is a collection in English of selected reading passages found in Phau Xyuaum Nyeem Zaj Lus, a publication designed to be used as Hmong literacy primer. The Hmong version was compiled by Ge Xiong Chong Kao, a teacher in Chaw Qhia Ntawv Hmoob, a Hmong literacy program in Ban Vinai Refugee Camp in Thailand. The Hmong publication has been distributed in the United States through the Center for Applied Linguistics. The publication of Hmong Way, with woodcut impressions found in Phau Xyuam Nyeem Zaj Lus, was done with the permission of Barbara Robson and Cheu Thao of the Center. We are grateful to them for their encouragement in our efforts.

The translation of selected passages of Phau Xyuam Nyee Zay Lus into English has been done through funding by Title VII, Project "TEACH" staff, including Tzong Vang Yang, Nao Tou Yang, and Kerry H. Bryne provided the bilingual/bicultural input for this publication. The process was a growing and sharing experience for all of us. We, as translators, have tried to maintain the essence of traditional Hmong world views in the English version. Any inadequacy to accomplish this ultimately rests on the English-dominant member of the team and not the Hmong members.

Our perceived utilization of Hmong Way is three-fold in nature. Its original purpose was to provide intermediate limited English proficient Hmong refugees with reading passages in English that they could more easily relate to. As the team interacted, it became apparent that the potential for presenting Hmong world views in a nontechnical manner was available. We hope that this will further promote cross-cultural understanding, especially if used in culturally diverse classrooms. A third potential use originally unforseen, at least on my part, is its value in terms of cultural maintainance for the younger Hmong who have few solid memories of their origins or those of their older family members. I have seen young Hmong casually begin to leaf through the material and become eager to read more. This, in itself, has made our efforts worthwhile.

Whatever your reason for sharing our experience, we hope that you will enjoy these selections. Perhaps, as a result, you will be tempted to explore other sources of information related to the Hmong. "The Free People."

Kerry H. Bryne
Bilingual Resource Trainer
Title VII, Project "TEACH"
Sheboygan, Wisconsin
July, 1985

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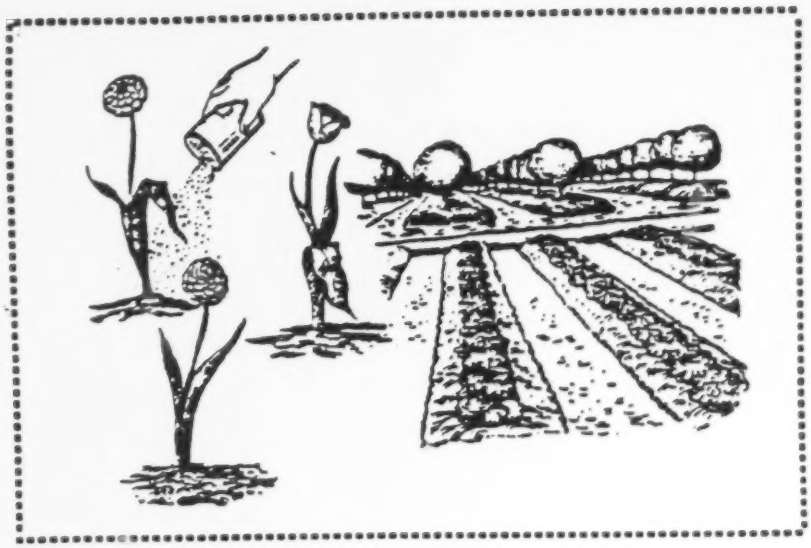


The Nature of Soil

Soil is not alive, but it does contain living things. All soil is not the same; the amount and nature of soil varies from place to place. Where there is less soil in a place, it is because water has washed some away. Where there is more soil, it is because trees, bamboo and other vegetation have died, decayed and become soil.

There are many different kinds of soil. Soil can be white, yellow, black, red or many other colors. There is also sticky soil, ordinary soil, rich soil and poor soil. Rich soil is soil that has fertilizer in it; it is good for growing crops. Poor soil does not have fertilizer in it. This kind of soil is not good for planting any crops at all. If you do plant crops in poor soil, you have to add fertilizer to help the crops grow well.

There are many layers or levels of soil. The most important lavers are the topsoil and the subsoil. The topsoil is the richest layer of soil. People, animals, and plants survive because of this layer of soil. We can say that the topsoil is the most important soil for all living things.

* *

1. Why do some places have more soil than other places?

2. What are the two important layers of soil?

3. What is rich soil?

4. Which layer of soil is the best for farming?

5. What do people need to add to poor soil?

The Nature of Water

Water is not alive, but it moves. Water does not die, but it can stop flowing. Water does not get hungry, but it can become dry. Water can be clear or murky.

Water is a liquid. When you put your hand in it, you can feel that your hand is wet. You can also feel if the water is hot or cold. If the weather is very cold, water becomes ice.

Water only flows downhill, never uphill. There are two kinds of water. One kind tastes flat; it really has no taste at all. The other kind of water tastes sweet. You can tell the difference between the two kinds when you taste the water.

* *

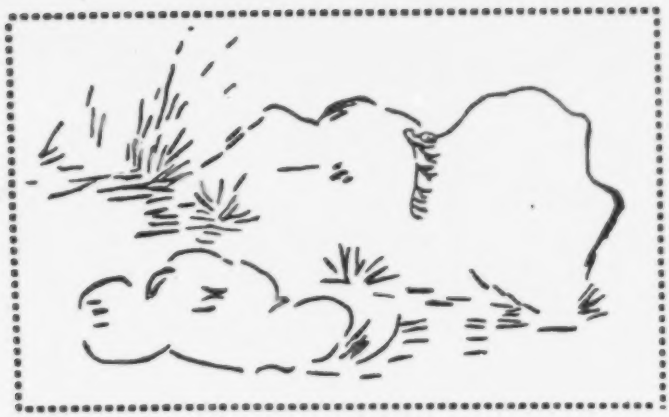
1. Is water alive like an animal is?

2. How many kinds of water are there?

3. When does water become ice?

4. Why can't water flow uphill?

5. Why is water important to people?



Rocks and Stones

Rocks are hard and they do not have life. They do not grow like a plant or animal does. Stones can be hard or soft; there are many different kinds. A stone also does not live or die, it only wears out or breaks and gets smaller and smaller.

Stones can not walk, but they can move. They are small because many years ago they rolled from place to place. As they moved, the stones became smaller and smaller. Some stones even became sand. This movement is also why stones have different shapes.

Stones are divided into water stones and land stones. Water stones are slippery because they have been washed and rinsed by water. Some stones are moved by swift water, then they are not rough like land stones. Land stones are so rough because there is no water to wash them. For this reason, land stones and water stones are a bit different in the way they look and feel.

Stones are important to people. Some use stones to build houses. Others use stones as whetstones to sharpen tools. We can use stones to help us in many ways.

* * * *

Trees

Trees have life like people and animals do. A tree has roots, branches, a trunk and leaves. Roots take water from the soil to feed the tree and keep it alive, they do not walk or change place. The roots hold the tree to the ground.

The Hmong people say there are two kinds of trees: straight trees and crooked trees. People use straight and beautiful trees to build houses and make some kinds of furniture. Some of the crooked trees are used for firewood, but not all of them. Hmong carpenters like to use crooked trees to make furniture and tools. After the crooked wood is stripped of its bark, the grain of the wood looks like striped designs and is more beautiful than the grain of straight wood. Hmong toolmakers choose tree branches by their natural shapes. Nature shapes Hmong tool handles, not people.

Trees are important to people in larger ways too. They keep the weather not too hot or not too cold. Any field that does not have trees will be very cold in the winter and very hot in the summer. Trees are an important part of our world.

* *

1. What takes water from the soil to feed the trees?

2. Why are trees important to people?

3. Why do Hmong carpenters use crooked trees?

4. What do trees do to the temperature of the land?

5. Why can't trees move around from place to place?

Crops

There are two general kinds of crops that Hmong people plant on their farms: spreading crops and standing crops.

Spreading crops include cucumbers, squash, gourds and pumpkins. Crops that spread have vines and their stems are soft. Spreading crops usually bear large fruit and vegetables, but there aren't as many on a plant as there are on standing crop plants. The reason for this is that the vine works hard growing along the ground and does not have enough strength to grow many vegetables or fruit too.

Standing crops include rice, corn and hot peppers. The stems of standing crops are hard and strong. Standing crop plants bear smaller fruit and vegetables because the stem can not support larger ones. These plants do produce a larger number of fruit or vegetables, however.

These are the two kinds of crops grown by Hmong farmers in Laos. Both kinds of plants are important to them.

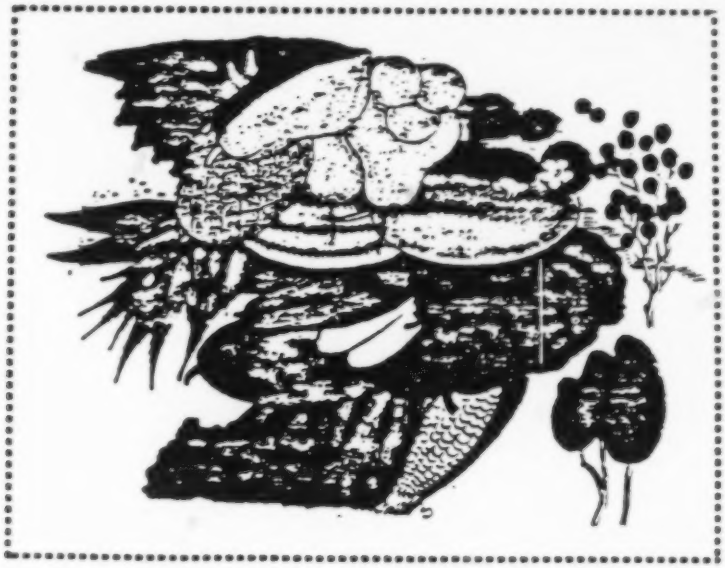
* *

1. What are the two general kinds of crops Hmong farmers grow?

2. What are the differences between standing crops and spreading crops?

3. Why do standing crops have smaller fruit and vegetables?

4. Give an example of a standing crop and a spreading crop.



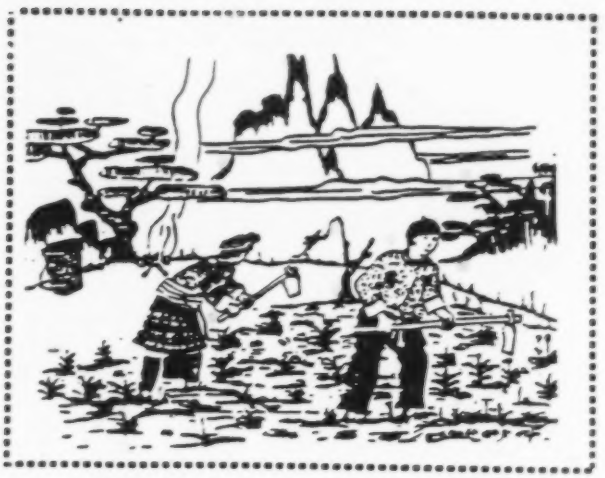
Choosing Seeds

Choosing the right seed is important to every farmer. Good seeds feel full when you hold them between your thumb and finger, bad seeds feel flat and empty. Before you sow any seeds, feel them to make sure that they are good.

If you are not careful when you choose corn seeds or rice seeds, the sprouts will be crooked and thin. If you plant seeds that are empty and flat, they will not sprout. Those seeds will just rot in the ground.

When you are ready for sowing, you must choose only the best seeds. A farm has beautiful plants when the farmer does this. The farmer gets more crops this way too.

* * * *



Planting Vegetable Gardens

Vegetable gardening can be successful if you learn how to garden the right way. Vegetables will grow no matter how you plant them if you have rich soil and use fertilizer. Dry soil that does not have fertilizer in it will not grow good vegetables. Vegetables will grow in either rich soil or poor soil if you do add fertilizer .

Once you think you have found the right place, you need to plant your garden. When you plant seedlings, just lightly cover the little plants. Leave space between each plant so they will have room to grow. If you do not leave enough space between them, the plants will grow tall and skinny. On the other hand, if you leave too much space, you will not get all the plants that you need.

Insects will eat any plant-beautiful or ugly. If a plant has insects you can put an insecticide on it. When you pick these plants to eat them, remember to wash them carefully first. If you do not wash the vegetables before you eat them, you can get sick or even die.

* *

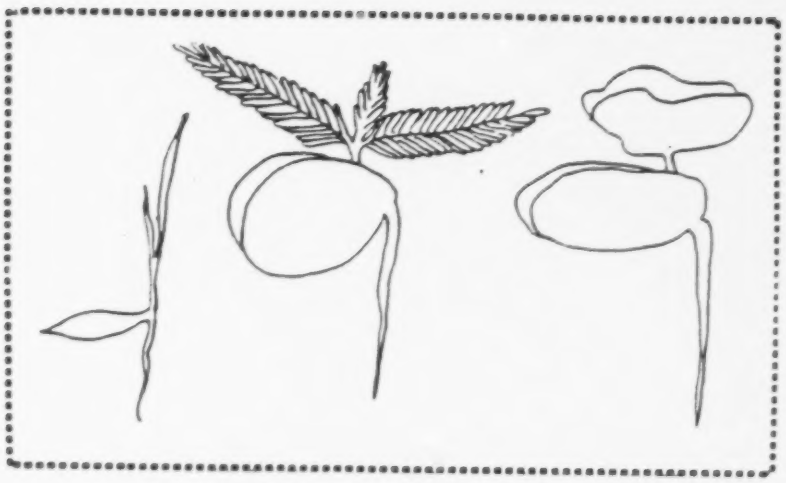
1. What kind of soil is good for a garden?

2. What happens to vegetables when you plant them too close together?

3. Why shouldn't you plant vegetables too far apart?

4. What can you do about insects on your vegetables?

5. What do you need to do with vegetables that have had insecticide on them?



Seed Development

The vegetable seeds that you plant are similar to wild seeds. One of the characteristics that both wild and garden seeds have is that some bring the shell above the ground when the green shoot grows and some do not. For example, the shells of corn and rice seeds stay in the ground; beans, tamarind and tree nuts have shells that the shoots push above the ground.

Seeds may be different in that characteristic, but all grow the same way- root first. Seeds begin with the root so that water can be absorbed to feed the plant. If the root can not absorb water, the plant will dry out and die. Once the root is developed, the seed works on growing the stem and leaves. With all the vegetables you start from seeds there is no kind that grows the stem first and then the roots. You know why!

* *

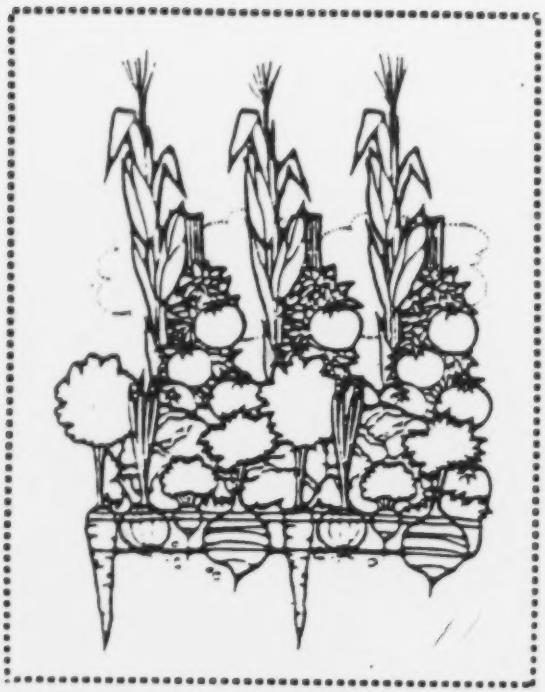
1. Do seeds begin with roots or leaves?

2. How are corn seeds different from bean seeds?

3. Why do seedlings begin with the roots first?

4. What happens to a plant that can not absorb water?

5. Are there any plants that start from seed and grow leaves before they grow a root?



Corn

In March, after slashing and burning their fields, Hmong in Laos plant "early corn." Each family plants some of this corn to make the children happy. Everyone likes "early corn" because it tastes sweeter than "late corn," it is so good that it is eaten as soon as it is ready to be harvested. In fact, none of the "early corn" planting is saved to be eaten later.

In April, Hmong people begin to plant their "late corn." A lot of corn is planted and the Hmong hope to harvest enough to store in granaries to feed their animals during the year. "Late corn" is also eaten by people, but it is not as sweet as "early corn" and people think that "early corn" tastes better.

* *

1. What kind of corn do Hmong people in Laos plant in March?

2. What kind of corn do the Hmong store in granaries?

3. Why do the Hmong plant more "late corn" than "early corn?"

4. Which corn do Hmong people think is the best-tasting?

The Animal World

In Laos the Hmong believed that all animals of the world belonged to one of three groups: land animals, amphibians, and water animals. Land animals included cows, buffalo, and horses. Fish were part of the water animal group. Animals that lived both on land and in water, such as frogs and turtles, were amphibious.

Each of the animal groups had their own characteristics, caused by environment in which the animals lived. For instance, water animals did not have feathers and some land animals did. Many land animals had hair and water animals did not. Some animals like seals had hair because they lived in the water part of the time, so they did not have feathers.

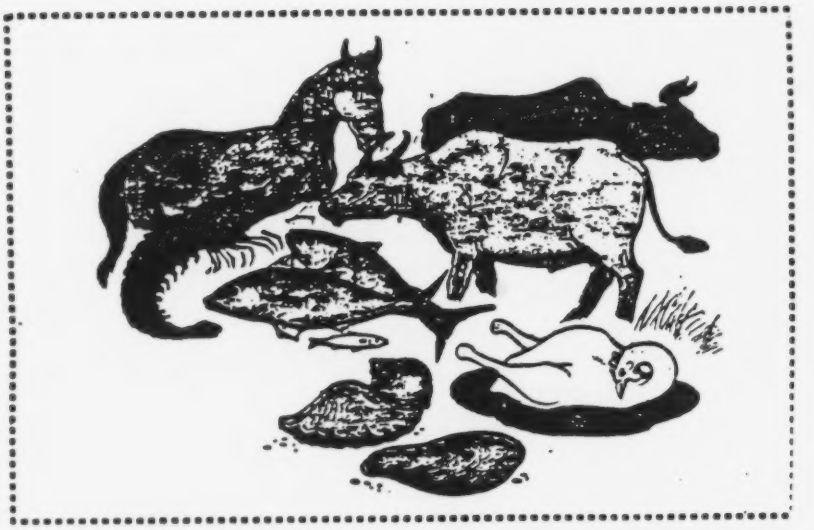
These are some of the old explanations of why animals look the way they do.

* *

1. How did the Hmong divide the animal world?

2. What group of animals were pigs in?

3. What was one difference between a land animal and a water animal?



Animals Beneficial to Man

Chickens, pigs, cows, buffalo, horses and dogs are useful to Hmong people in Laos. Hmong raise chickens to eat and to offer during spirit worship. Some people like to raise roosters for fighting or use them to attract wild chickens. Cows and buffalo are also raised to eat and to repay promises made to the spirits. Many people raise bulls for fighting, especially at the New Year's celebration. Horses are raised for riding or for transporting corn and rice from the fields. Some nationalities, like the French, raise horses to eat like the Hmong eat chickens and pigs. Dogs are raised to watch the houses and hunt wild animals. Dogs are never eaten by the Hmong.

All of these animals are very important to people, but they must be watched carefully by their owners. Unwatched animals will get into crops and eat them or make other problems for their owners.

* *

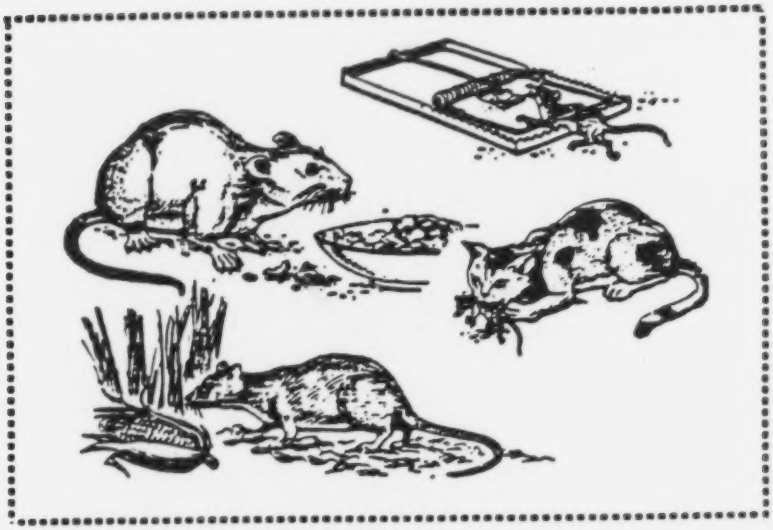
1. Why are chickens important to the Hmong?

2. Do the Hmong raise pigs for fighting?

3. What animal fights at New Year's celebrations?

4. What do Hmong people use dogs for?

5. What happens when an owner forgets to watch his animals?



Animals Harmful to Man

Animals such as mice, ants, and insects that eat grain and crops are never useful to man. These animals find things to eat from farm to farm and season to season.

Not only do animal pests eat things on the farm, they also make problems in the city. These animals get into people's houses, make noises day and night defecate in stored food and damage clothing. Ants also live in the wall and come out to bother people.

Everyone should be careful around these animal pests; they always hide where you can not see them until it is too late. Be sure to cover all of your food before you go to bed or you will wake up with a bad surprise!

* *

1. Name an animal harmful to man.

2. Why are pests harmful to us?

3. What can animal pests do to your farm?

4. How can people stop animal pests?

Turtles

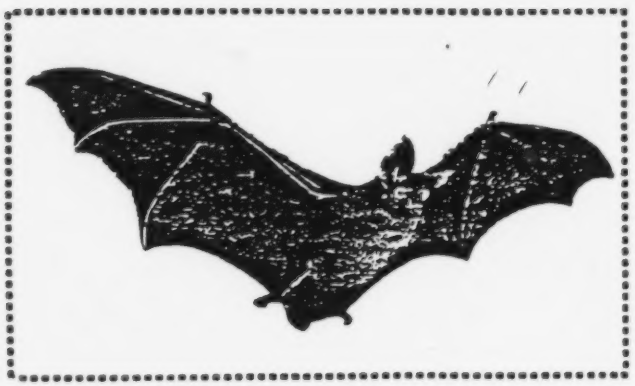
A turtle is a very strange kind of animal. Turtle legs are short; that is why it walks very slowly. Turtles do not have feathers; they are covered with a hard shell that is connected to the skin.

Turtles not only look strange, they also act very strange. When a turtle sees an enemy, it hides its head inside of a shell. The turtle is also a four-legged animal that lays eggs! Unlike other egg-laying animals, it can not fly because it does not have wings.

The turtle is, indeed, a very strange animal.

* *

1. How do turtles reproduce?
2. Why can't turtles fly?
3. Why does a turtle walk slowly?
4. What does a turtle do when it sees an enemy?
5. What are the differences between a turtle and a buffalo?



Bats

Bats are another kind of unusual animal. There are two kinds of bats; one kind likes to live in closed areas and the other lives in more open areas. The kind that lives is closed areas likes caves. The other kind of bat lives under palm tree leaves, in holes in bamboo and inside banana leaf shoots.

Bats have wings and they can fly, but they do not have feathers. A bat has fur that is very short and smooth like mouse fur. Birds lay eggs, but bats give birth to live babies. Bats find food at night and sleep during the day.

Bats fly like birds, but when they land they just hang upside down. When they are resting or flying they do not look like birds because their wings are just two pieces of skin and some bones. They even have ears! Bats are strange flying animals.

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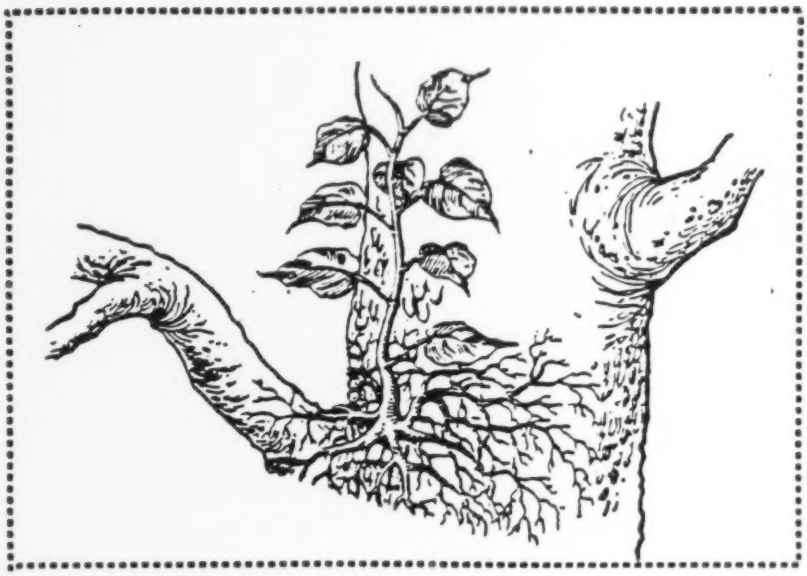


Hmong Herbs-

"Green Medicine"

A long time ago, the Hmong lived on the Laotian mountains away from the towns. Whenever someone was sick, people went to the shaman and the shaman used herbs to cure the sick person. Many kinds of leaves and roots are good for herbal medicine, but it is not easy to learn all the herbs and how they are used. Some of the older people know which herbs they were given before, but even they only remember a few of them.

Hmong shaman also used magic words to cure sick people. Together, herbs and magic were important to the Hmong when they lived on the mountains. Some Hmong use "green medicine" in their new country too. Even if Hmong medicine has changed for some people, the older people remember "green medicine" and how it helped them.

* *

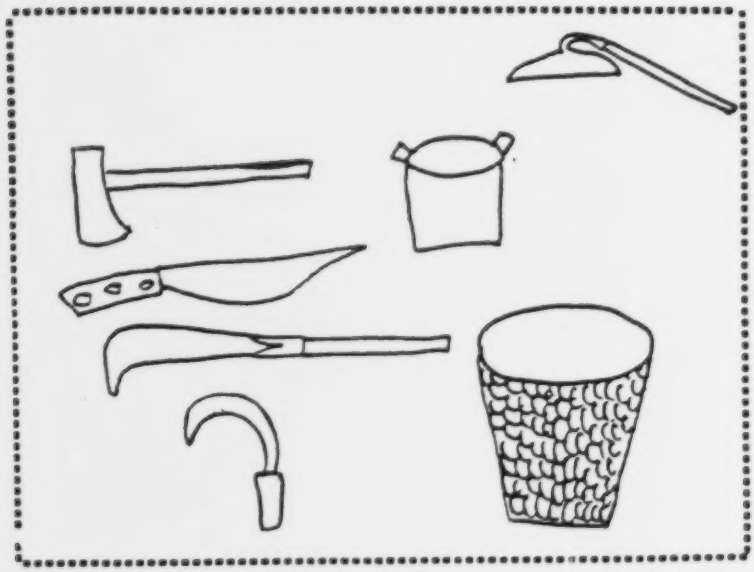
1. What is "green medicine?"

2. Who knew all about "green medicine?"

3. Where did the Hmong used to live?

4. Why did the Hmong used to go to a shaman?

5. Do any Hmong use "green medicine" in the United States?



Hmong Tools and Utensils

There are many tools that the Hmong have used for a long time. Axes, knives, hoes, guns and rice sickles were all used by Hmong in Laos. They also used metal pots and pans, plates,forks and spoons. All of these were used in their old way of life.

If a family did not have all of the tools or utensils it needed, it would have a hard time living. The family would then have to borrow what it needed from another family. Hmong people did not like to borrow those things because then the family would get a bad name. It was important for each family to have its own personal tools.

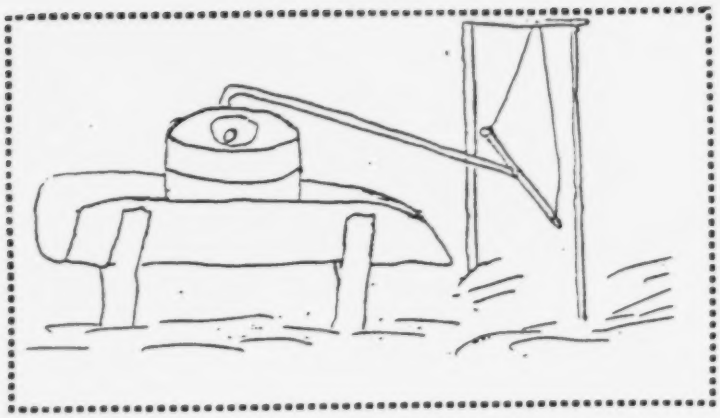
* *

1. Name some of the tools used by the Hmong in Laos.

2. Why are some of the tools not used by the Hmong in the United States?

3. What would a Hmong family have to do if it did not have all the tools it needed?

4. What would other Hmong families think about a family that borrowed tools and utensils all of the time?



Traditional Hmong Machinery

A long time ago, the Hmong started using the grindstone and the treadmill (footmill). The treadmill was used to hull rice and the grindstone was used for corn, rice, beans. The grindstone made these crops into powder (flour).

In the past, the Hmong did not have metal machines to grind rice or corn. In those days they chisled stone to make grindstones and treadmills.

Later, some smart person built a water wheel that used water power instead of manpower. This made the work easier for everyone. In whatever form, the Hmong have used some kind of grindstone and treadmill for a very long time.

* * * *